RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

August 2008

Socio-economic Series 08-015

City of Dryden—Sustainable Waterfront Development Plan

INTRODUCTION

The City of Dryden (pop 8,600) has an opportunity to develop 48 ha (120 acre) of waterfront on the shores of Wabigoon Lake. This area includes privately owned land, protected wetlands, municipal land and surplus Crown land. The City is seeking to create a "destination place" and to define sustainable community development practices that are appropriate for the site and for Dryden. To facilitate this, the city developed the Sustainable Waterfront Development Plan to illustrate a proposed organization of the site and design features for the waterfront lands. In October 2007, the community was engaged in planning through a charrette-based community engagement process, in which CMHC partnered with the City to fund and facilitate.[1]

The Sustainable Waterfront Development Plan includes an overall, spatial, organizational framework plan for the site, concepts for linkages within the City and to the hinterland and region, concepts for smart growth, green infrastructure and sustainability and a program of implementation steps. The plan provides viable options for development of the waterfront sites that are compatible with the community, in harmony with the character of the surrounding neighbourhood and which are based on principles of sustainability. It is a tool to help City Council and its partners to acquire, assemble and develop the waterfront.

BACKGROUND

Dryden is located in Ontario's Sunset Country on the Trans-Canada Highway, halfway between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg. This is Canada's boreal region and it is characterized by vast forests, Precambrian rock and many lakes. Dryden is in a small, isolated geological plain anomaly. This area has traditionally been known as a fishing and hunting destination for American tourists. The City of Dryden is a partner in the Gateway to Canada project, which seeks to support and interpret sustainable ecosystem management in the region and the City is now exploring ways to diversify and expand it's tourism market in the following fields:

Figure 1 Charrette teams

- Nature tours and eco-tours (in partnership with First Nations);
- Package tours (local business, resource-based operators);
- Adventure and sports tourism (windsurfing, kayaking);
- Wilderness canoeing (Trans Canada Trail water route—connect to White Otter Castle[2]);
- Eco-cultural (manomin [wild rice] fields, blueberry picking, pictographs);
- Winter and shoulder season (fall and spring) activities.

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[1] For information about design charrettes, see the CMHC Socio-economic Research Highlight *Sustainable Community Planning and Development:* Design Charrette Planning Guide. To download, go to the CMHC website at www.cmhc.gc.ca, go to Order Desk and look for OPIMS product no.62779.

[2] White Otter Castle is a three-storey log building on the shore of White Otter Lake, near Atikokan, Ont., built by James Alexander "Jimmy" McOuat, between 1903 and 1914.

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HOME TO CANADIANS

Any one of these enterprises could be anchored at the proposed waterfront development area, especially in partnership with user groups, like-minded organizations and neighbouring communities.

The waterfront site, also called the Claybanks area, consists of about 15 ha (38 acres) of development lands adjacent to 22 ha (56 acres) of protected marsh lands to the north, open waters to the east and south, and Partridge Island, 12.5 ha (31 acres) of waterfront lands owned by the Dryden Yacht Club (*see* figure 2).

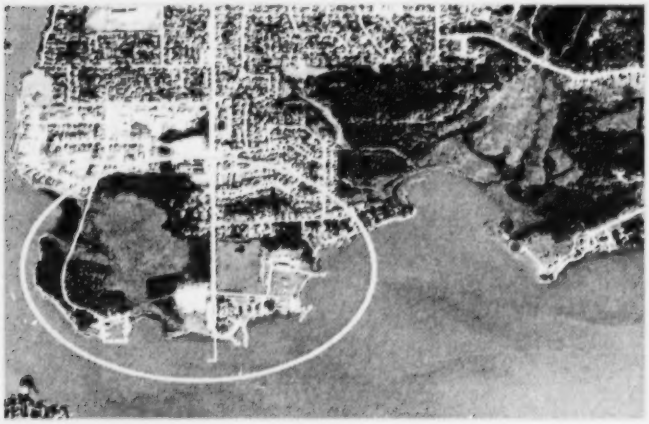


Figure 2 Site in context

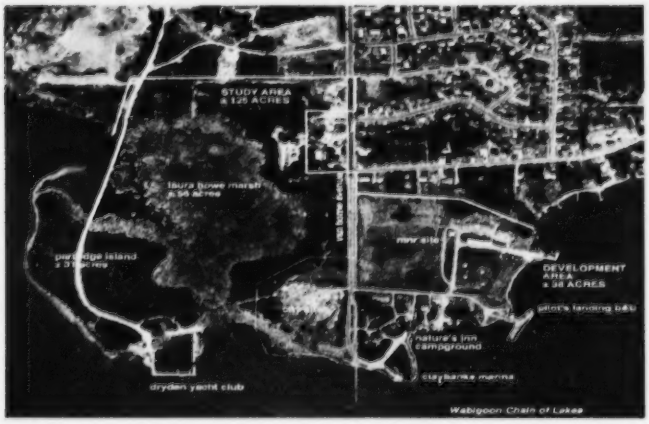


Figure 3 Site area

The 15.46 ha of developable land consists of:

- 4.17 ha (10.31 acres) owned by the City of Dryden;
- 1.70 ha (4.2 acres) of marina and Nature's Inn, a private RV Park;
- 8.35 ha (20.63 acres) owned by the Ontario Realty Corporation (ORC) and leased to Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR). This property is surplus to the current needs of OMNR, which is prepared to relocate to a new area for its modest needs if replacement facilities are provided at no cost;
- 43 ha (1.07 acres) owned by Pilot's Landing, with an existing bed and breakfast and the Dryden Seaplane Base of the Canada Border Services Agency, which operates from May to September every year.
- Approximately .81 ha (2 acres), consisting of four privately owned waterfront lots between the Nature's Inn and Pilot's Landing.

Owners of the private properties have all expressed an interest in exploring the development potential of the area. The plan considers development potential in terms of the optimal mix of potential uses, the opportunities for landowners and the role the City can play to foster private sector investment (*see* figure 3).

CHARRETTE OBJECTIVES AND PLANNING PROCESS

Objectives

A project team made up of the consultants and the city's economic development office designed the charrette to address the following objectives:

- To establish a set of values and principles to guide site development.
- To develop feasible options for the waterfront site that would be sensitive to the established values and guiding principles, support the principles of sustainability and be in harmony with the City's Strategic Plan.
- To engage community members in the planning to foster community commitment to shared values and to foster civic pride.
- To bring together politicians, city administrators, community members and other stakeholders to engage in productive dialogue.
- To cooperate in an open-ended, flexible process that had no predetermined outcome, other than working towards a shared vision and development framework.

Participants

Citizens, local business people, landowners and government representatives (federal, provincial and municipal) were canvassed about their interest and ability to participate in the charrette. Of 100 invitees, 33 signed on for the charrette. Most attended all three days. The participants provided a cross-section of interests and included the area's property owners or their representatives.

Figure 4 Participants

The Charrette

The charrette was designed to provide information to participants through presentations and to solicit feedback through round table working sessions and reporting.

Day one began with introductions and an explanation of the charrette. Participants were divided into five groups, which they stayed in during the charrette (*see* figures 1 and 4).

The project team gave presentations about the site, its context, and its strategic value in the community. The project team also gave an example of a similar development, The Forks in Winnipeg, and the story of its planning and development.

Each group then developed its consensus descriptions of the important values and guiding principles that would inform future decisions (in this charrette and afterwards), drawing on the information presented and then presented extensive lists of values and guiding principles. At the end of the day the facilitators synthesized this information into a concise list that captured the key elements. This list was displayed and referred to for the rest of the event.

Figure 5 Typical Presentation

The second day was devoted to enhancing the participants' understanding of the site and how the site connects to the city and the region, and to determining the types of development that are compatible with the site's attributes; the site's context; and the community's needs.

Presentations by the project team focused on community needs, "smart growth" and sustainability (*see* figure 5). Groups worked at developing their ideas for linkages between the site, the city and the region. Each group presented its thoughts on program opportunities for the site. The facilitators synthesized this information into composite lists and diagrams after the teams had left for the day.

On the third day, groups developed their ideas on the spatial organization of the waterfront in increasing detail, starting with general zoning diagrams and moving to detailed layouts (*see* figure 6).

The project team stimulated participants' imagination with presentations about municipal servicing and green infrastructure and interesting examples of other waterfront sites.

Participants were provided with a toolbox that included an air photo of the site, templates of various generic development footprints, rolls of sketch paper and various drawing tools. The groups used these tools to test and explore spatial scenarios and organizational concepts, ending with a preferred development scenario for the entire site, which was then presented to all.

The five group diagrams were then displayed for public review and the charrette concluded with comments from City Council.

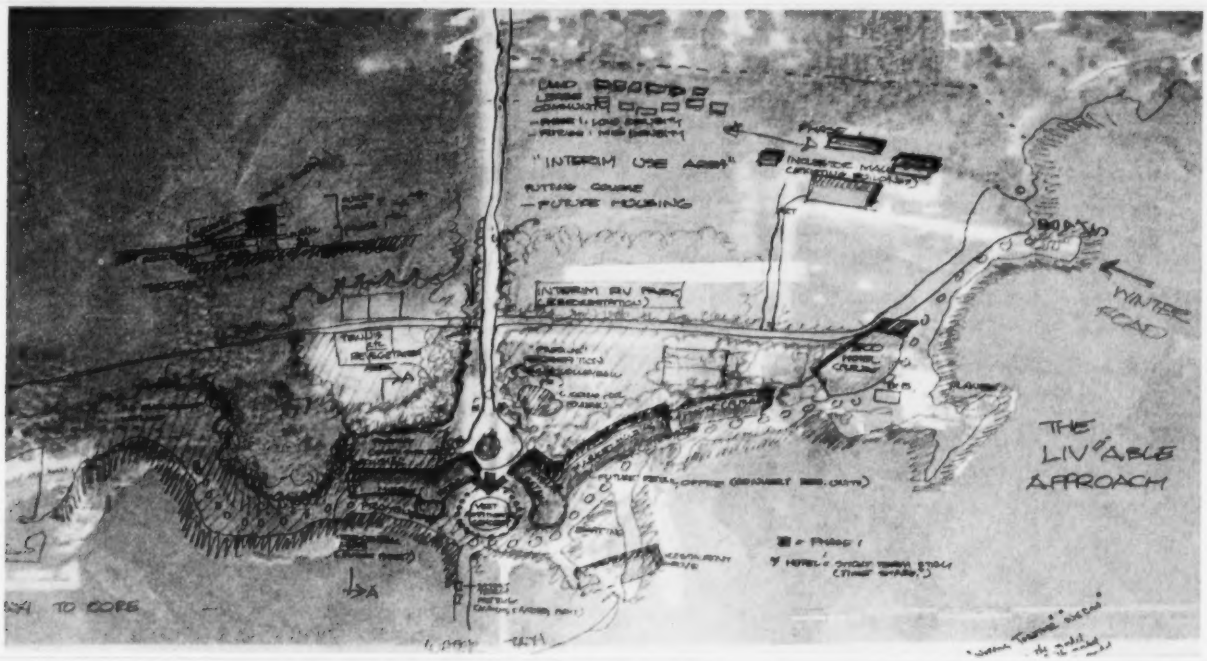
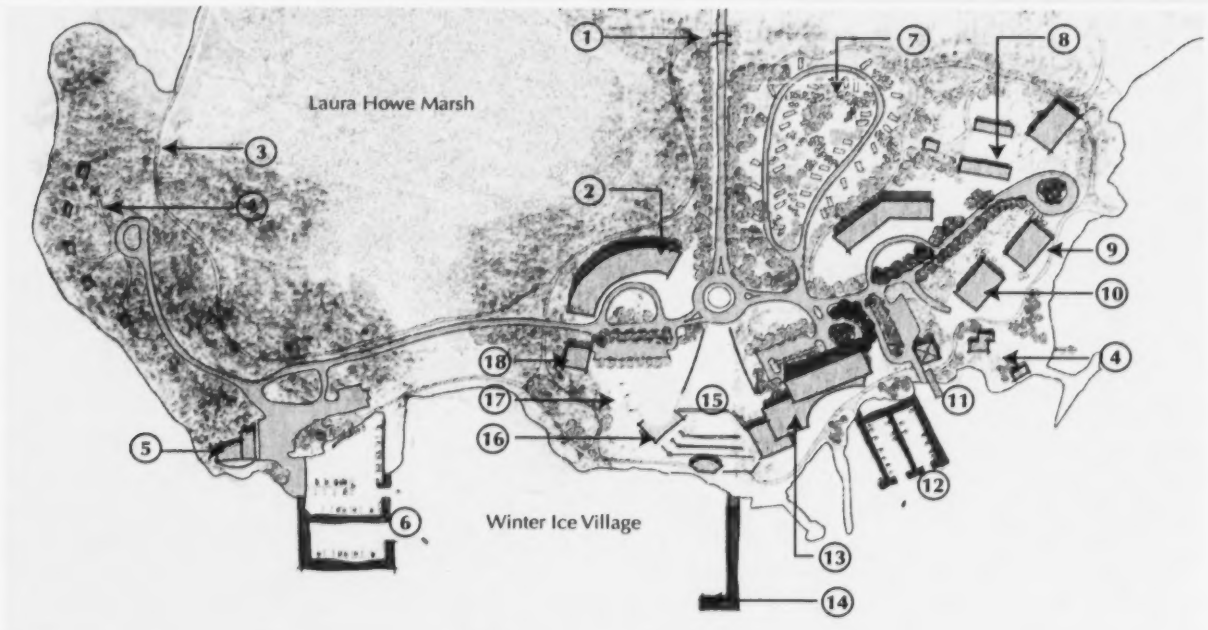


Figure 6 Typical working session product



1 Van Horne & Gateway
2 Mixed Use Development - Residential
3 Pedestrian only
4 Tourism
5 Public/Private Club Facilities
6 Keel Boat Marina Expansion
7 Seasonal RV Park - Interim Use
8 Wabigoon Lake Art Centre
9 Public Shoreline
10 Residential
11 Boat Launch
12 Public/Private Marina
13 Mixed Use Development - Tourism
14 Lighthouse
15 Dryden Centennial Festival Park
16 Wabigoon Lake Interpretive Centre
17 Water Park
18 Waste Water Treatment & Engineered Wetland Displays

Figure 7 Site development plan

SUSTAINABLE WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

When the charrette was over, the project team documented the work collected from the round table sessions and synthesized a final, conceptual, site development plan (*see* figure 7). This plan represents the project team's selection of development ideas that best represent the agreed values and guiding principles.

The Sustainable Waterfront Development Plan provides a framework for development of this important site. This plan, synthesized from all of the charrette work along with dialogue with the city administration answers questions about the community's perspective on what is desirable, what is possible and what the community will likely support. It provides City Council with the information necessary to formalize an implementation strategy and to act on opportunities as they arise. The adoption of this plan as a framework will permit the City to make decisions on individual elements within the context of a whole development vision.

CONCLUSIONS—NEXT STEPS

The following activities are recommended as next steps for the community towards implementing the Sustainable Waterfront Development Plan.

1. City Council should adopt the plan as a framework document and authorize the administration to prepare plans, budgets and timelines for implementation.
2. City Council should negotiate with Ontario Realty Corporation to acquire the Ministry of Natural Resources site and to resolve ownership of the Laura Howe Marsh. Develop communication strategies.
3. Continue community engagement:
   - To promote the benefits of community consultation, comprehensive planning and sustainable development;
   - To position the City as a leader in Northern Ontario and rural Canada;
   - To respond to all reasonable opportunities to speak about the community vision and promote its benefits; and
   - To identify and target communications to potential investors and private sector partners in response to specific market and sector opportunities.
4. Prepare a sector plan or equivalent planning document to formalize the intentions for the site:
   - Coordinate with official plan and zoning::
   - Designate this area as a "Community Improvement Area" for the purpose of facilitating partnership opportunities; and
   - Prepare a special designation regarding sustainable development criteria for the site. This may use a LEED standard for new buildings and site planning (LEED ND will soon be available) or an approach developed specifically for Dryden using a process such as the "Natural Step," which has been used in a number of municipalities in Canada.
5. Complete the following reports.
   - Report to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) on study findings to date.
   - Report on the potential use of engineered wetlands to address the waste water treatment needs on this site. This concept may also be considered as an alternative solution to waste water treatment plant expansion and/or as a solution for other development areas. Waste water reduction by means of water savings measures should also be considered.
   - Report on the potential to use alternative energy solutions (for example, geothermal energy, solar and/or biomass) as stand-alone facilities or as a public utility for all new development in the area.
   - Report on the preliminary engineering and budget for new roadway design on site and abandonment of yacht club road causeway.
6. Undertake business plans and/or feasibility studies for specific opportunities.
   - Dryden Development Corp (DDC): Centennial Park, waterfront promenade and water park.
   - City of Dryden: Preliminary design and budget for conversion of Van Horne roadway to incorporate active transportation route and wayfinding.[1]
   - DDC: Adaptive reuse potential and business scenarios for existing Ministry of Natural Resources structures.
   - DDC and private sector: Marina development.
   - DDC, City of Dryden, Dryden Museum, First Nations or Grand Council Treaty #3, Dryden Chamber of Commerce: visitor centre/interpretive centre/tourist centre/ museum.

[1] "Wayfinding" is a term coined by urban planner Kevin A. Lynch, who defined wayfinding as "a consistent use and organization of definite sensory cues from the external environment." Environmental psychologist Romedi Passini expanded the concept to include signage and other graphic communication, clues inherent in the building's spatial grammar, logical space planning, audible communication, tactile elements, and provision for special-needs users.

- DDC and Dryden Yacht Club: marina expansion, clubhouse and banquet facility development and rental eco-cabins.

7. Develop partnership arrangements:

   - Formalize partnership arrangements for projects as needed based on outcome of feasibility studies.
   - Develop capital plan and leverage 2008 capital budget funding for implementation (FedNor[4], Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation [NOHFC[5]], FCM).

8. Promote and nurture private sector investments:

   - Promote private sector development on existing city lands and existing privately held lands in keeping with the development vision and subject to engineering study findings and cost-benefit analysis.

9. Build, operate and maintain public infrastructure.

10. Enjoy benefits in perpetuity.

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[4] FedNor is a federal regional development organization in Ontario that works with a variety of partners, as both a facilitator and catalyst, to help create an environment in which communities can thrive, businesses can grow and people can prosper.

[5] NOHFC is a provincial government program that works with northern entrepreneurs and businesses to foster private sector job creation while supporting critical infrastructure and community development projects that build a foundation for future economic growth and enhanced quality of life.

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